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Taking a Course in Go-Getting

Students hustle as company recruiters return to campus

Kathleen Whittemore, 21, a senior majoring in international relations at U.C.L.A., has launched a campaign that requires preparation, precision and luck: looking for a job. Like many other ambitious college seniors, she has bought a dress-for-success wardrobe, worked as an unpaid intern, and attended seminars on résumé writing and interviewing. She signs up for the maximum three interviews with company recruiters allowed students each week, and then seeks additional appointments by getting to the U.C.L.A. placement office by 5:30 or 6 a.m. to see if any fellow students have canceled. Says she: "I'm finding if I'm not one of the first five in the door, I'm not getting anything." She has interviewed with 23 companies, including Mobil and Procter & Gamble. Her score so far: two rejections and 13 invitations for second interviews.

Whittemore is confident she will find a job. Reason: 1984 promises to be a good year on the employment front, after a two-year decline in campus recruiting marked by the lowest activity since World War II. At U.C.L.A. and most other campuses, corporations are again scouting for talent. Northwestern University's Endicott report on national employment trends for college graduates is predicting a 20% increase in job opportunities for the class of '84. The annual survey has found that 65% of 260 sample companies plan to hire more college graduates this year and that 71% believe that business is going to improve. Hot majors continue to be engineering, accounting, sales and computer science. In the accounting field, 123 companies plan to take on about 4,500 graduates this year, a healthy rise from 111 companies and 3,500 jobs in 1983. Generally, there will be more graduates than job openings. Nonetheless, Stephen Johansson, director of career counseling and placement at Vermont's Middlebury College, notes, "The students seem a little more relaxed. Last year when we opened our doors in the morning we had to do so with a chair in one hand and a whip in the other to beat off the crowd of panicked seniors."

The University of Wisconsin-Madison campus is typical: corporate recruiting is up by 10% to 12% over last year. At some schools, oil companies and banks, which have done little hiring for two years, are back in the game. McDonald's is recruiting managers at the Ivy League's Brown University because of a need for "people who have high mental and physical energy levels." Even the Central Intelligence Agency has returned to campus, with 120 interested seniors showing up for a presentation at Stanford despite the impediment of 20 polite protesters.

Companies, in general, seem pleased with what they are finding. Says Hewlett-Packard Recruiter John Arserio: "The caliber of students is up. More and more you're finding students with real work experience." Jan Blakslee, director of management and planning at American Hospital Supply Corp., declares, "We're looking for people who can think, who have the courage of their convictions, who can make decisions and demonstrate the kind of leadership qualities we value."

Students with specialized and technical skills continue to have an edge. A top M.B.A. student from the business school of the University of Texas at Austin will get five to six job offers with starting salaries of \$27,000 to \$29,000, according to a college official.

Many companies, though, are looking to the broader backgrounds of liberal arts graduates. Says New England Telephone Recruiter Bob Smith, who has 125 to 150 jobs to fill: "We need managers who can deal with diverse situations, and liberal arts students are perfect for that because they've had a diverse education." Neiman-Marcus, the famous department-store chain, has a history of hiring people with esoteric majors such as linguistics and rhetoric. Says Craig Innes, a vice president: "We're looking for breadth of knowledge."

Although students are more optimistic, they are hardly complacent. At Emory University, which this year has seen a 44% increase in the number of recruiters, some students camp out in sleeping bags on Sun-

day nights to be first to sign up for the interviews posted at the career center every Monday morning. Grouses Senior Patricia Smith: "Companies sometimes wind up talking not to the most qualified candidates but to the earliest risers." Indeed, many college placement offices have begun to look like a cross between command headquarters and central casting, with their data banks on FORTUNE 500 companies and sophisticated videotaping facilities for mock interviews.

The serious job hunter has turned into a grim professional. Stephanie Moffett, a senior majoring in English and American literature at Harvard, has been hunting for a job in advertising or public relations. She works at three jobs to help pay her way

through school, sends out twelve job-query letters a week, and has made so many phone calls that she has switched to Sprint, a system that offers long-distance calls at lower cost. So far she has had no offers. Says she: "Sometimes I'm enthusiastic and sometimes I'm worried. The long term doesn't bother me; the short term does."

There is a heightened sense of pursuit on both sides of the table. Some of the large accounting firms, for instance, have begun to interview promising juniors. Students are eager to please. Chuck Superville, a senior accounting major at U.T. Austin, says he bought a new suit and got what he calls "an accountant's haircut." After 22 interviews, he received six job offers and accepted a \$24,000 position at Coopers & Lybrand, an international accounting firm. Says he: "Recruiters were calling me at all hours of the day and night. I couldn't sleep and my studies were going downhill. I'm relieved the recruiting game is over." —By Ellie McGrath. Reported by Leslie Cauley/Atlanta and Lisa Towle/Boston, with other bureaus